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Aurea nunc verè aunt secula: plurimus auro
Venit honos. — Propert. Epist.

Poets have feigned the golden age is gone —
Alas! this age is led by gold alone. Anon.

IT has always been one of the
labors of the ignorant, from the
earliest times, to the present day,
to lament the mournful de-
cay of public morals, and the
increasing corruption of genuine
taste. The mind, which has never
travelled into the regions of ex-
perience and fact, to elucidate
the maxims of speculative truth,

is continually indulging in idle and useless reflections, dictated by individual circumstances and restless animosity. There are always some, in the huge and complicated mass of civilized society, who form the flowers of life, and vary the nature of their condition, by complaining of evils, which have always existed, and wondering at a depravity which is grey with the winter of years. In the darkness of national misfortune; in unexpected danger, and sudden calamity; we hear the sadness of the public lot, imputed to any but the right cause: and, lost in airy visions of what never had a real existence, men lift up the eye of distress on the vanished glory of the ages that are gone; and the fading vi

tues of the times that remain.

The mists of error and superstition, are scattered before the beams of increasing refinement; as the clouds of darkness that obscure the human heart, in its natural state, untempered by reason, and unenlightened by revelation, fly to the shades of eternal night; in such a proportion must man advance in his wants, as in his knowledge, in the number of his desires, as in the enlargement of his views. All our wishes must, of necessity, be limited by our acquaintance with external objects: we cannot yearn for a blessing which we never knew, nor run after a folly of which we never heard. As the field of our reflections expands, we see new motives for labor, &

new incentives to exertion. The nature of our situation varies, and the limit of our ambition extends.

To those, then, who are continually harping on the degeneracy of our times, a little reflection may not be out of time. They do not appear to consider, that the corruption which wealth and refinement must necessarily introduce, is more than counterbalanced by that elevation of sentiment, and superiority of enjoyment, which spring from the growth of national importance. The influx of riches engenders crime, but it widens the sphere of useful science, and diversifies the sources of human happiness. The abuse of those plenteous blessings, which

the hand of indulgent heaven rains down upon our earth, has always been the consequence of the rapidity of general improvement: and it is not more to be lamented at the present, that the appetite for gain swallows up the finest emotions of the soul, than it was to be deplored, when crouching Greece sunk beneath the bribes of the Macedonian conqueror, and Carthage relinquished her victories, that she might riot in her gold.

We shall not, therefore, at this time, raise our feeble voices in the ~~general~~ useless outcry, which the vulgar rabble echo to the skies: but shall

content ourselves with some general observations on the nature of our countrymen, as to their thirst for riches, and eagerness for gain; as they are accompanied with circumstances and actions, strangely inconsistent with the avarice which seems so universally to rule the conduct, and direct the heart.

It is a truth established beyond the power of contradiction, that we have, on this side of the Atlantic waters, all the eagerness to augment our treasures with lucre, without controling its influence sufficiently by higher and more ennobling desires: that we suffer genius to die neglected, and learning to languish in obscurity, while we run headlong after the truest pursuits of selfish gratifi-

cation. We imitate our predecessors & our contemporaries with so scrupulous an accuracy, in this degrading portion of their character, without endeavoring, like them to build upon the strong foundations of our wealth that edifice of literary distinction, which would adorn the name, and consolidate the strength of the commonwealth. While no poverty pinches us at home; while secure from the blast, and sheltered from the storm; we seem very well contented to overlook the calamities of those, who toil for our pleasure, and labor for our instruction: and while the mendicant author might beg his bread in ignominious dependence, our petty

nobility would foster in the arms of their paternal encouragement, the wretch with nothing but the plenitude of his coffers to recommend him to notice, hide his crimes in oblivion, and veil his depravity from ~~the~~ view.

In this then it is, that our peculiarity consists: we are no more violent in our inclinations for self, than those who run the career of national glory along with us;—but, by an exclusive attachment to money, as the object to which all our wishes tend, as the great centre of attraction, we rest ~~all~~ our ideas of dignity of character, upon that which

at best, can only embellish in life, and is to be esteemed, not as the test of individual greatness, but only as a means of purchasing those refined pleasures, which without it we could not enjoy. We attempt, with an effrontery which is better imagined in thought, than expressed in words, to rate the powers of the human intellect, by the standard of gold that cankers and silver that rusts: quench the fires of genius by the frosty hand of selfish indifference, and sink the dignity of mind below the elevation of its natural rank. If the

rich, whose province it is to encourage the weak, & raise the distrest, would only fulfil the business of their station;— if those, whose respectability can alone be found in the splendor of their equipage, and the pride of their wealth, would with a modesty becoming their ignorance, withhold their interference in what they do not understand, and be satisfied with humble endeavors to aid their struggles of unfortunate Genius, it might forbear to notice their defects, and laugh at their weakness: but when we see presump-

tion and vanity setting
their seal of approbation
or condemnation
upon the labors of enlight-
ened talent, and inflated
riches regulating the stan-
dard of public taste,
we cannot restrain our
indignation at such an
unprecedented abuse
of all those rules of pro-
priety, which civilization
has imposed upon man-
kind. If no writer can
be read, because he is
stained by the pollution
of helpless poverty; if
the aristocracy of tal-
ent must yield its palm
of merited preeminence,
to the vulgar pretensions

of those who do not know, and will not learn; if the sceptre of authority must be snatched from hands alone fitted to wield it, and transferred to the weak, who are too feeble, and the proud, who are too unprincipled, to sway with equity and truth the empire of literature, & ~~truth~~ readers will to all that is great in the present, and all that is cheering in the future.

Q.